

VZCZCXRO0404
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHLZ
DE RUEHRL #0124/01 0281354
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 281354Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6402
INFO RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUCNFRG/FRG COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 1965
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0690
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1207
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 2707
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1726
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0889
RHMFIUU/HQ USAF RAMSTEIN AB GE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE//J5 DIRECTORATE (MC)//
RHMFISS/CDRUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE
RUZEADH/UDITDUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 BERLIN 000124

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/PAPD, EUR/PPA, EUR/CE, INR/EUC, INR/P,
SECDEF FOR USDP/ISA/DSAA, DIA FOR DC-4A

VIENNA FOR CSBM, CSCE, PAA

"PERISHABLE INFORMATION -- DO NOT SERVICE"

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [AF](#) [YM](#) [HO](#) [CE](#) [IR](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S., AFGHANISTAN, YEMEN, HONDURAS, SRI
LANKA, IRAN, GERMANY-U.S.;BERLIN

- [1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary
- [1](#)2. (U.S.) State of the Union Address
- [1](#)3. (Afghanistan) London Conference, German Strategy
- [1](#)4. (Yemen) London Conference
- [1](#)5. (Honduras) Lobo Inauguration
- [1](#)6. (Sri Lanka) Outcome of Elections
- [1](#)7. (Iran) Nuclear Program
- [1](#)8. (Germany-U.S.) German Family Gets Asylum in the U.S.

- [1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary

ZDF-TV's and ARD-TV's primetime newscasts opened with stories on Holocaust Memorial Day. Newspapers led with a broad variety of stories, including Iran, Afghanistan, the Holocaust, and the Left Party. Frankfurter Allgemeine headlined: "Berlin rejects Iran's 'absurd' allegations," and Tagesspiegel highlighted Chancellor Merkel's speech on Afghanistan: "Merkel: Mission in Afghanistan has been correct." Editorials focused on Israeli President Peres' speech to the German parliament, the situation in Afghanistan and presidential elections in Sri Lanka. Several papers also carried editorials on the German family that was granted asylum in America. Frankfurter Allgemeine carried a front-page photo of the family.

- [1](#)2. (U.S.) State of the Union Address

Broadcast and online media led with stories on President Obama's State of the Union address, highlighting that he would stick to his healthcare plans and make the creation of jobs his greatest priority.

ZDF-TV's Heute reported: "In his address on the State of the Union, President Obama admitted that his government has made mistakes. He said that the change that was promised had not come fast enough for many Americans. The priority will now be the creation of jobs and the regulation of the financial markets. In addition, Obama will stick to the healthcare reform. He expressed optimism about a success in Afghanistan. As of July 2011, Afghan soldiers are

supposed to gradually take over the leadership."

Deutschlandfunk radio reported: "U.S. President Obama wants to stick to his healthcare reform plans despite the increasing opposition. Obama said in his first State of the Union address that millions of Americans would lose their insurance this year. He will not walk away from these people. The President called on Democrats and oppositional Republicans to overcome their differences of opinion. Obama also announced that job creation would become a main priority of the government's policy next year. He proposed using the 30 billion dollars in repaid government loans to support smaller enterprises."

ARD-TV's Tagesthemen opined: "The man in the White House never lacked courage. Without the economic crisis, he would shine as a determined reformer. His frustration is understandable. However, given the huge burden of the national debt, the state of the nation remains gloomy. Barack Obama must perform a miracle in his second year: create jobs and boost the economy with less money. If he succeeds, he would be the hero of the world and would deserve the Nobel Prize - for economics."

Spiegel Online reported under the headline "Messiah in short sleeves" that, given "electoral setbacks, bad polls and a stronger opposition, Barack Obama is going through his first great crisis as U.S. President-and has now responded to it with a great speech. In Congress, he reached out to his critics and described the fight against the unemployment crisis as his most important mission.... Obama made a comeback with a convincing presentation. Whole passages of his 70-minute-speech expressed the panic of low polling

BERLIN 00000124 002 OF 005

results. Two-thirds of the address was devoted to the economic situation. He criticized banks, promised a lot of money for better schools, nicer streets and quicker trains.... He made clear that he wants to listen to the skeptics who fear the national debt and unemployment. It took an hour until he had time for foreign policy.... In his first real crisis speech as the President, Obama did not walk away from change but said that he never said that change would be easy.... Obama is faithful to himself, also in his first great crisis-and he is reinventing himself. Obama still speaks like a messiah, but one in short sleeves."

13. (Afghanistan) London Conference, German Strategy

Almost all papers carried reports on Chancellor Merkel's governmental address on Germany's future strategy in Afghanistan and on the upcoming conference in London. Tagesspiegel (1/28) headlined: "Merkel: Afghanistan Mission is Correct," While FAZ (1/28) carried a front-page report under the headline: "Merkel Opposed to Date for Withdrawal from Afghanistan," and reported: "Even though Chancellor Merkel refused to announce the withdrawal of the first German soldiers from Afghanistan by the end of 2011, she did not want to mention an end of the mission." In a governmental address on the Afghanistan conference in London, she said in the Bundestag that the issue is to 'transfer responsibility' [to the Afghan government].

Under the headline: "The London Crutch," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (1/28) editorialized: "If conferences had decided Afghanistan's fate, then the country would have been an oasis of peace, prosperity and a fertile ground for peaceful co-existence for a long time...but Afghanistan's fate will not be decided in conferences. The meeting in London was convened because there are mounting doubts about the success and even the meaning of the operation in the 43 troop contributing countries. But the conference in London will not decide on a new strategy. So many new strategies have been invented for Afghanistan that we should rather speak of tactical twitchings. The conference does not decide on peace with the Taliban or the performance of the Afghan government either. The conference is a political crutch with which the allies support each other - it is an exercise which is intended to encourage all parties involved for the final stage of this intervention.... More important than London are now Washington and Kabul. The final decision on success or failure will be made in Washington. It is important what the United States does or does not do. The international community will act in a

defensive way and under pressure from its voters strive for a halfway honorable withdrawal. This is America's goal. But Kabul will make the final decision on the treatment of the Taliban. And this is President Karzai's task. He will integrate the Taliban, turn the country a bit more towards Islamic extremism and, if he is lucky, separate the Taliban in a credible and lasting way from al-Qaida. More will not be possible in Afghanistan."

Rhein-Neckar Zeitung of Heidelberg (1/28) judged: "The Afghanistan conference in London will not bring the country a step closer to peace. It is this political theater which serves the West in initiating an orderly withdrawal. Following months of silence, the German change of strategy is only an un-original imitation of the U.S. decision. The United States has given up the maximum goal of returning Afghanistan to the Afghans in an orderly way and to do this by excluding the former occupants. But they already failed when they began the second Iraq War following the reconquest of Kabul."

In an editorial, Die Welt (1/28) dealt with the German position at the Afghanistan conference and judged under the headline: "Delusion of a German Strategy" that "the Germans were primarily interested in a decision on how and to what extent Germany could integrate into an overall concept for Afghanistan when they discussed their strategy."

BERLIN 00000124 003 OF 005

As always the German principle was to wriggle out of excessive demands and be as smart as possible. The plan that has come out of this strategy now it is at the border of things that the German government is able to convey to a skeptical German public. And it represents the minimum it can offer to the allies without being considered a refusnik. It is now up to Angela Merkel to sell this bad compromise as a silver bullet for stability in Afghanistan that will then lead to a withdrawal. With it, [the German government] leaves President Obama, who wanted 10,000 soldiers from the allies, coolly in the lurch.

Regional daily Mittelbayerische Zeitung of Regensburg (1/28) argued: "When talking about an Afghanistan strategy, then we should be fair and say that Germany is now only complying with the demands of the United States. But the German government does not have a plan on its own. The former SPD chairman Kurt Beck was the only one who had presented an individual plan two years ago. Following a visit to Kabul he suggested entering into talks with moderate Taliban. But at that time, foreign policy experts unanimously criticized him for this. Today, the search for Taliban who are willing to talk is part of the political situation games in Germany and the United States. The global politicians in Berlin should probably ask Beck whether he has new plans. He probably has another future-oriented concept."

14. (Yemen) London Conference

Under the headline: "U.S. Military Helped Yemenite Army to Hunt al-Qaida," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (1/28) reported: "The southern Arab country wants support in the fight against terrorists but does not want to allow international forces on its territory." U.S. security experts have known for a long time that the impoverished Yemen has turned into a reservoir for radicals, especially al-Qaida fighters. But the U.S. government does not want to speak loudly about its military support of the Yemenite armed forces because Washington is afraid that this could further weaken the position of the Yemenite government. Several U.S. military officials now reported to the Washington Post that they did not directly take part in military operations but offered assistance in planning operations against al-Qaida.... The report was published on Wednesday, the day of the Yemen conference in London to which British government officials had invited representatives of 20 nations. Secretary Clinton also took part but it lasted only two hours and ended with a rather general declaration of solidarity."

Tagesspiegel (1/28) headlined: "120 Minutes for Yemen - A Conference in London is to Prevent Yemen from Becoming a Failed State," and reported: "Out of fear of new terror attacks, the international community wants to aid Yemen. That is why it promised more aid in the fight against the al-Qaida terror network to the poorest Arab country during a brief conference in London. The United States took

the meeting very seriously and evidence of this was the participation of Secretary Clinton who, for this reason, did not take part in the President Obama's State of the Union address in Washington on Wednesday. The U.S. coordinator for the fight against Terrorism, Ambassador Dan Benjamin, said similar to the situation in Afghanistan, a 'double strategy' is planned for Yemen. For weeks, the Americans have worked closely with Yemen in the fight against al-Qaida on the Arab peninsula. Benjamin also said that 'in addition to security cooperation, another issue was sustainable long-term engagement of the international community [in Yemen]."

Regional daily MQRkische Oderzeitung of Frankfurt on the Oder (1/28) judged: "It has been clear that Yemen, similar to Somalia, is a hopeless case because no one has been interested in it for a long time. A turnabout now comes too late. Increasing poverty caused by a decline in oil revenue, is now driving the poor population into the arms of radical Islamists. Formally, Yemen continues to exist as a state. But the government, which pins its hopes on a military

BERLIN 00000124 004 OF 005

solution, is increasingly losing control. Anarchy and chaos are taking their course."

15. (Honduras) Lobo Inauguration

Under the headline: "A Coup is Being Rubber Stamped," die tageszeitung (1/28) opined: "These were great words: Secretary Clinton said that one would no longer tolerate coups and Honduran President Zelaya must be re-installed immediately and without any preconditions. But Roberto Micheletti, who planned the March 28 coup and proclaimed to be the next president, prevailed and Zelaya will now go into exile. With Porfirio Lobo another oligarch has now come into office. His election on November 29 was everything but fair and free. Can such a president be recognized? A few conservative Latin American states already recognized him, and no one had expected anything else.... The reactions to the coup and protests that are becoming smaller are a fatal sign for the region. Lobo's recognition has now sealed it: coups will continue to be tolerated. In Honduras's neighborhood, there are enough oligarchs and generals who will certainly view this sign with benevolence."

16. (Sri Lanka) Outcome of Elections

Frankfurter Rundschau (1/28) opined: "Following the triumph over the Tamil rebels, Sri Lanka urgently needs a government leader that can reconcile the people. Whether Singhalese hardliner Mahinda Rajapaksa can be that man must be doubted. Under his leadership, the former model democracy of Sri Lanka turned into a lawless state with a corrupt elite.... The government shamefully used the state-run media in the election campaign and prevented Fonseka's supporters from casting their ballots... This means nothing good for the minorities in the country, particularly the Tamils."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/28) editorialized: "If there was election fraud during the presidential elections in Sri Lanka, the masterminds did a sophisticated job. It is not unlikely that current President Rajapaksa would get 60 percent of the vote, so that the people must not be angry over the current and future government leaders. Rival candidate Fonseka responded accordingly. He wants to challenge the results at court. This would not go beyond the borders of the system. However, the situation might still escalate because Rajapaksa's supporters suggest that Fonseka is considering a coup... Sri Lanka has never been a model of a democracy."

Berliner Zeitung (1/28) commented: "Sri Lanka has the choice between the known evil of current President Rajapakse and an unknown of the name of Sarath Fonseka, a former army leader. The large majority of the Buddhist Singhalese voted for Rajapakse because they like the policy of the radical nationalist, despite the corruption and nepotism. The Muslim minority and the Hindi Tamils are not expecting anything good to come from the former and new head of state and government. However, the winner must now demonstrate the willingness to take care particularly of the social and political matters of the Tamils. From his powerful position, Rajapakse could build bridges between the rivaling groups. Unfortunately, it looks

like he will miss this opportunity."

17. (Iran) Nuclear Program

Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/28) argued in a front-page editorial: The Iranian regime that is threatening [to destroy Israel] whose trademarks are the support of terrorism and repression and which is, in addition, striving for the bomb, is not only a danger for Israel.

It is regrettable that in the UN Security Council, Russia and China continue to minimize or even deny this danger. This attitude has prevented the necessary international cohesion and resolve when dealing with Iran. This is a policy which the German government in

BERLIN 00000124 005 OF 005

particular has tried to achieve again and again. It is also regrettable that Tehran ignored Washington's offer for a dialogue. The chancellor said that time is running out. At least Israel hopes that these words from Germany are seriously meant. The nuclear conflict with Iran is turning into a litmus test for German-Israeli relations, which are and will remain special."

18. (Germany-U.S.) German Family Gets Asylum in the U.S.

Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/28) editorialized: "The U.S. state of Tennessee has granted the Romeikes political asylum because they were not allowed to home-school their children in Germany. The Romeikes are not the first family to be granted asylum in the U.S. And they are not the first German parents who considered leaving the country because of the compulsory schooling in Germany. Given the situation of some schools in larger cities, the desire of parents to teach their children at home is understandable. Some would even be able to do this. However, the few that would benefit from it face a huge number of victims if the compulsorily school attendance were lifted. In some parts of southwestern Germany, compulsory schooling is law for more than four hundred years. It was a major step forward in the path of the Enlightenment and general progress. Homeschooling has only become popular in the U.S. over the last 30 years, particularly among Evangelicals like the Romeikes. They should not refer to Luther."

Under the headline "Exaggerated," Die Welt (1/28) commented: "This persistence must be admired. For years, Uwe and Hannelore Romeike from Baden-Württemberg have been fighting against the state's compulsory school attendance. They want to home-school them for religious reasons and because they do not accept the values communicated at schools. This is their right.... Although the concerns of the parents are honorable, they are also exaggerated: a judge in Memphis has granted them political asylum in the U.S. For a long time, it has been difficult for parents in Germany to teach their children differently from the state's school agenda. Schools often do not take individual ways of life into account. However, much has happened there in recent years. There is an increasing number of private schools of which many are affiliated to a religion. Grants also make it possible for poorer families to send their children there. Why didn't the Romeikes spare the children all the problems by sending them to such a school?"

MURPHY